



Scott Tusa: I think what we'll do is just a brief practice, maybe two minutes just to settle in together, and then I'll give a brief talk before some longer practice. So go ahead and just find your seat, wherever you are. If you can allow the body to settle into an upright yet relaxed posture, that would be great. You can close your eyes if you'd like or if you'd like to leave them open, that's also fine.

Just for a minute or so, we're going to come into the breath, letting the breath deepen on the inhalation to three counts, letting it deepen on the exhalation to also three counts. And just choose somewhere in your body where it feels comfortable to be with the breath. For me, I love to place one hand on my abdomen and just feel the breath entering my lungs and abdomen. Each breath, allowing it to draw you into the body. In each exhalation, just allowing yourself to settle and rest. If you can, just allow your attention to meet the breath in the body, allowing it to soften you. Each breath, just letting go of the previous moment, allowing you to be in the body more and more.

To close our brief opening practice, we'll take one deep inhalation through the nose and then out from the mouth. Just release the practice. You can open your eyes and just rest in the body if that feels okay to you right now. Feeling the connection to your seat, the ground, and the floor below you.

So, again, thanks for joining me. So what I want to talk about tonight is just some ideas from the Buddhist tradition on how we can work with this situation, how we can work with our relationship to COVID-19 as it continues to unfold, all the uncertainty that's been happening in the world, and obviously affecting us and those around us.

I've noticed for me, not last week but the week before—when things started to heat up a little bit more here in New York—I just noticed there was so much more anxiety in my body, almost bridging on panic, which is, you know, not usual for me. I realized this is just so big that many of us don't know where to put it or how to handle it. And so, we need to take extra care.

After a day or two of inner panic I realized this requires some deep medicine, and the buddhadharma is such a medicine. And mainly this is a medicine that we work with with the mind. And so the Buddha has said that how we interact with the world, what we perceive comes from the mind. Of course, the outer world affects us, but how we work with our mind in situations is the actual main substance of whether something becomes workable for us, something that we can develop a deeper relationship and health towards, or if it becomes



unworkable, and we spin into anxiety, trauma responses, and panic. We need to take care of our inner mindset. Fear and anxiety start in the mind. Therefore we must turn towards the mind if we want to develop a healthier relationship with them.

Dharma practice and the medicine of the dharma are about becoming aware of, and working with, our body, speech, and mind to eliminate the causes of suffering, and to uncover our awakened potential for the benefit of others. That applies whether there's a pandemic or not. These are the moments where actually, we can use our practice to shine. This is of course when meditation can be extremely beneficial for us. So I've found part of this is first working with the shock of this situation.

So what we're going to do tonight is a practice of body awareness. And to me, this is my go-to thing when I experience some kind of shock, because the shock, of course, is felt in the thinking mind, but it's primarily felt in the body. Once we work with the shock, there's a process of accepting what's going on. For some of us, we're probably in various stages of this. Some of us have accepted the stay-in-place that's happening in a lot of our areas. And for some of us, we're having a harder time accepting that, or we're having a harder time working with the uncertainty. So what I want to put out there is that there is hope, we can work with this, because we all have a mind and we all have a capability to work with that mind.

The mind, in its habitual tendencies, tends to project outward. It tends to ruminate in worry, fear, anxiety, and it tends to project that onto a news source, or the latest article on COVID-19. So we need to take care of ourselves, and we need to spend part of our day turning inwards, and maybe part of our day just slowing down. So maybe some of you are in places and areas where it's easier to do that. New York City is slower than I've ever seen it, probably. But we all need to take extra care, right? So this starts with first working with the shock of the situation and accepting what the reality is right now, even though there's still a lot of uncertainty for many of us. Then working with this mind that wants to find safety outwards, right? And so what we'll do tonight is a practice of working with safety in the body. Making our body a safe place for us to hang out. And so, I think we'll do that right now.

So go ahead and find a meditative posture. Again, if you want to find a seat that's comfortable for you, to find a posture that's relaxed, yet alert. You can close your eyes for this one, if you want. So we're going to work with meeting the sensations in the body. This can be a little uncomfortable for some of us at first if you aren't used to this kind of practice, but I guarantee if you give it more time and practice, it gets easier. I do want to state as a caveat for some of us



who have strong trauma in the body—this may not be the best practice for you, so I want you to take care. What you can do if you know you have strong trauma in the body that might get triggered, you can find a place in the body that feels neutral to you.

We're going to go ahead and begin by meeting the feet. And this is just simply feeling the feet. You can wiggle your toes if you need to. Just feel your feet as they connect with the floor, the earth, the ground below you.

Same as you begin to connect and feel your legs. Starting to inhabit the body more and more. What this means is that we're first becoming aware, becoming present. The feelings and sensations in the body here now, the feet, the legs. But we're also beginning to inhabit the body, to live from what's inside of it. What this means is, as you meet your shins, ankles, feet, knees, see if you can *inhabit* the spaces of the knees. See if you can *inhabit* the spaces of the upper legs, the thighs.

Just be. There is nothing to change or cultivate. We're just simply being with right now. Usually the feet and the legs are a neutral place for most, so this is somewhere you can always come back to in the practice tonight if another part of the body gets overwhelmed.

So moving on from upper legs, moving into our seat, feeling the chair below us, our seat below us. Feeling our pelvic floor, into our hips. Just letting the mind abide within the body. If you begin to ruminate, if thinking starts to take over your practice, just drop back into the body. We're just hanging out in the body here. We're just hanging out in the hips now, we're hanging out in our seat as we're connected to the chair or ground below. So we're not seeking calm through this. We're just seeking to be.

The same as we enter now our lower abdomen. Here as we start to enter the trunk of the body, the real core of the body. This is where a lot of the content of our anxieties and emotions arises. Just see what sensations you start to notice here. Maybe some of us are at ease already, maybe some of us are activated, a little more anxious. Maybe some of us are experiencing other kinds of emotions. So can you meet that experience in the body as the sensation and just watch?

We use the awareness of the mind that can bear witness to our experience, bear witness to the sensations in the body. So panic and fear may not be arising for you right now. But can we meet it if it does? Sometimes when panic and fear arise, the last thing we do is feel it. We try everything else. You ruminate projecting outwards. We distract ourselves. It can be a little



counterintuitive at first, but with practice we start to see that meeting the panic or anxiety in the body can allow it to actually settle. Again, this may not be the case for everyone in every situation. So you may need to titrate, which means to go back and forth between somewhere neutral in the body and the activated part. So for me, sometimes my anxiety really gets activated in the belly area. So I may go back to the feet as a grounding sense in the body, and then come back up to the anxiety in my belly. Just do that for a little while, going back and forth. So you could try that.

Right now just bearing witness, just watching the belly if you can. Do the same as we move into now the solar plexus and the mid-body right underneath the rib cage. Just explore your body here, you can explore the front of the body, the back, the sides. Just allowing yourself to feel the sensations, to arrive in the body as it is. We watch, but we watch and feel at the same time. Part of the mind is bearing witness, or feeling as we're bearing witness. The same as we move to the core of the body now, into the chest. Feeling the front of the chest, the sides, the back. Do you need a stronger anchor? Maybe you're feeling the breath in the chest.

Again, how much can you let be? This doesn't mean letting go, it just means arriving, allowing, and being. Bearing witness to sensation after sensation. Dropping the analysis of sensation and just being with it. There's definitely an element of kindness here, being kind to sensations and emotions we might dislike. Like panic, fear, and anxiety, which can be really uncomfortable. Instead of immediately rejecting them, bringing curiosity as we feel them.

The same as we feel the shoulders, arms, hands, fingers. Now the neck, the throat. Finally, inhabiting the space of the head, just feeling the head, the front of the head, the muscles of the face. Relaxing those muscles if you can. The back of the head. And just sitting in the middle of your head where your brain sits.

From the middle of the head, we're going to scan back into the rest of the body. So as we widen out from the head, we don't lose track of the previous part of the body. As we come back into the throat, shoulders, and arms, we don't leave the head. We come into the chest, but we don't leave the throat and shoulders. We just start to include more and more of our embodied experience. Coming down into the mid-body and the abdomen, down into our lower abdomen and our seat, our legs, knees, calves, and finally our feet. We're just sitting in the body, the entire body now, as if we're sitting in the center of a room. Just allowing yourself to be within the body, to feel the sensations in the body.



Just rest there, watching the waves of the body. As we watch the waves, our awareness is there, our quality of bearing witness, our quality of watching. Just like the depths of the ocean. All the waves can happen on top of the ocean yet we're connected with the depth of awareness. So we don't go with every tinge of fear, but we allow it to arise and we feel it.

Again, if you notice the mind wanting to ruminate in the story, trying to figure out the feeling, trying to figure out what to do with it, just drop back into the body. You can choose a spot in the body to drop back into, like the abdomen or the feet, or just drop into the body as a whole. We're just going to continue to be there.

The practice is to stay aware, to watch, but to be in the body to feel, to stay connected to sensation. But we're not becoming hijacked by that sensation. We're allowing it to arise as it is. So if there's a certain sensation arising in the body and you want to meet that, you find that it's arising in a particular place, you can go to that. Go to it with the kindness of non-judgement. Just be gentle. This can take some practice. Just stay with this for another minute or so, while we close out the practice

Okay, so starting to wake the physical body up, we can sway a little bit from side to side, if that feels comfortable. We can gently stretch our neck if you like, or roll your shoulders back and forth. And as you open your eyes and come back into the room, just notice what's shifted for you. Notice how the body feels without analyzing too much. Just notice the shifts that happen. Okay. Thank you so much for practicing with me. So, some questions?

Moderator: Hi everyone. Thank you Scott for that practice.

Scott: Sure.

Moderator: Looks like we have some questions; I'll read them out loud.

Lisa has a question: "Given the importance of the body, can you comment on the role of good nutrition and hydration?"

I'm a Buddhist teacher, not a doctor. Nutrition and hydration—like for coronavirus, that's the question?



Moderator: She didn't specify, but I assume in this time when everyone's paying heightened attention to their health.

Scott: Yeah, I mean, I think eating well and making sure you're hydrated is just good anytime, right? Whether we're sick or not, but definitely now. I think keeping our immune systems up is great. I'm trying to do that myself by drinking a lot of vitamin C and so yeah, definitely. I don't have too much more to say about it. Yes, it is good.

An anonymous attendee asks, "In your body scan we rested with a physical sensation as a sensation. How can we rest with thoughts and emotions as a sensation independent of the story and disidentify with the sense of self?"

Yeah. So basically what we do with the emotion when we're talking about being in the body and working with the sensation part of it, is an emotion usually has two components, it can have a thought component and then it can have a feeling component. With this particular practice, we mainly rest with the feeling part of the emotion. Now as far as thoughts go, thoughts aren't really embodied material, they're mind material. So what we can do is watch thoughts. That's also another practice. What we can do is watch the contents of thoughts as they arise just as we watch the waves of the body arise and fall, we can watch the waves of the mind arise and fall. Of course, this takes some practice of general meditative awareness, cultivating what we call *shamatha* in the Buddhist tradition, calm abiding practice.

The more we develop this, the more we develop a quality where we can have an underlying awareness where thoughts can come, they can go, etc., like that. And so slowly, we don't identify as strongly with our thoughts. Then slowly we also start to see into what we call the three characteristics in Buddhism, of impermanence, *dukkha*, and not-self (*anatman*) and emptiness (*shunyata*).

There's a question from Diane. She says, "Meditation has helped me so much during this time and I have people in my life I feel would benefit. How can I approach suggesting meditation without scaring people off?"

Yeah. I think that you have to use your wisdom. Seeing how open the person is. What I tend to do is wait for people to ask, but that's just me. But, if you think someone is open to it, yeah, you can say it's something that's really helped you, and you want to share it with them. Or you can send them a book, or a podcast, or an article. Texting someone an article or something like that can open a door. So yeah, you just have to use your wisdom to see how open they are.



I definitely think it doesn't work so well when we're like, "Hey honey, you should really meditate to work on your anger." You know, maybe that doesn't work too well! But I think you know what I mean, just making sure people are open to it. And then, yeah, send them an article or buy them a book that you really like on meditation.

Katrina asks, "Is there any particular reason to start with the feet in the body scan?"

No, you can start anywhere you want. I like to start there because I think a lot of us are really disconnected from the lower body in modern culture, we tend to be very top heavy, very much more up in the head. We tend to kind of hang out there sensory wise. So emphasizing the feet and our connection to the earth can be new to people and immediately grounding. So that's why I tend to do that.

And so, I end at the head because we see the differences. Usually by the time we get to the head, I noticed with most of the students I work with, at least in the beginning, they're like, "Oh, that feels comfortable." And so that's kind of nice to see that we are a little bit too comfortable with being up here, right? We see that contrast. And then more and more, we can direct our attention to the lower body, to kind of hanging out in the abdomen, or the legs, or the feet. I usually recommend that, because when we're mainly top heavy up here, the energies of the body—what we call in Tibetan medicine part of the subtle body—it increases those energies in the upper body which can create anxiety as well. So actually thinking of and being in the lower body can just reduce the anxiety in itself. We do that a lot. It brings the energies down, what we call the wind energy in the body.

Speaking of anxiety, Maisha has a question, "Can you please suggest ways to work with anxiety and fear in the mind without holding it or letting it affect us?"

Yeah, everything we just did. To me, this is kind of my go to, because most of us neglect the body. All we have—and it's not our fault—but for many of us, all we've been trained in is how to use the cognitive mind, right? And there's nothing wrong with the cognitive mind. But when it's the only thing we have to rely on, we're constantly trying to figure out how to deal with a situation, or with the panic, or the fear, or anxiety. All that does is creates more anxiety. So, for me, what really changed my life is practices like the one I just shared with you, where you have to go to the feeling of the anxiety in the body, right? So that's why I did the practice with you, as we did it. When you do that, it's not necessarily comfortable at first because we're not used to meeting anxiety and those kinds of feelings. But over time, as we do it slowly, we start to see that actually resisting it and/or just ruminating again and again in our thinking mind isn't really fixing the problem or changing it. But if we allow ourselves to be and feel, over time, the panic



and anxiety can start to settle. So it's a little counterintuitive at first but to me it's the one thing that's really helped my anxiety.

We also have a question from Judith, "Is there a particular practice you can recommend to help with sleep during this time?"

Yeah, I mean, sorry, not to be repetitive. I'm also having trouble sleeping lately and what I tend to do is go into the lower body. I'll bring my attention to my feet, and try to stay there, and then try to drop the thinking mind if I can. That's a little easier said than done. But I'll try to drop it into the body and just be. Sometimes that works for me. I'm not a sleep meditation expert. So maybe there'd be better people to ask. But I tend to do practices similar to what I showed you. A body scan like that can be really good before bed, scanning up and down things like that.

Carolyn asks, "This reminds me of a meditation I did with Thich Nhat Hanh, are you influenced by his practice at all?"

I love Thich Nhat Hanh, but no, this particular style of practice comes from a combination of stuff. My teacher, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, does a lot of embodied practices as part of his initial trainings and retreats that he offers. So it's a little bit of that, also the flavor of other somatic work I've trained in. Then in my one-to-one work, I do a lot of somatic work with people, body based meditations, and things like that. So it's a blend of all of that. But yeah, you can see things in common in somatic psychology, as well as other Buddhist teachers like that I'm sure.

Ross has a question about letting go of what we can't control. They say that they "Live with three other people and while we've set up safety and cleaning protocols for shopping and entering the house, I don't feel like we're all on the same page of diligence due to different worldviews."

Yeah, I think it's a tough one, because we have to work with our own anxieties around this, right? From a Buddhist perspective, we cannot push off suffering completely. The moment we're born, we're guaranteed to have to experience some kind of suffering. And eventually, of course, we all have to die. That's just part of this. I think this pandemic has brought up for us, this huge existential question of death.

I think working with control means working with our fears and anxieties of getting sick, working with our fears and anxieties of death. Right? Depending on how much you want to take that on, it can be really beneficial, because it relates back to the first noble truth where the Buddha asked us to look into the nature of suffering. When we look at it, we don't do it to become more depressed, it's actually to become more sober around it, to see that we can avoid suffering. So we



have a choice then, and the choice is how do we want to meet that suffering. That's where I think we can work with the control around it.

Some of us are going to get sick with this virus. And some of us, it sounds like the majority of us, are going to be okay and survive it. Some of us won't, unfortunately. And so we can work with that. We can work with our own relationship to that. There is sadness around that. We have to know how to hold that sadness and that bearing witness. So there has to be compassion there as well. Compassion for ourselves, and then compassion for others. So I think when it comes to control, it's working with our own suffering, or our own anxieties and fears, and then working compassionately with others. Just recognizing, some people aren't quarantining, right? Some people are just gonna ignore it, they're not gonna do it. And so that's their choice. But anyway, that's what I would say.

We have a question from an anonymous attendee. "I like to listen to dharma talks a lot. I feel as though if I were to listen while going for a walk or doing some other light exercise, I wouldn't be able to be fully present for either activity. But I'm curious to hear your thoughts on listening to dharma talks while multitasking with another activity."

Maybe I'm a bad influence, but I do that when I'm on the subway in New York, though I'm not on the subway now or recently. I listen to dharma talks when I'm when I'm walking around. I think we have to get it in wherever we can get it in. As long as you can pay attention to what's being taught, that's good. If you're multitasking so much that you can't pay attention at all, and you're losing information, and you're not holding it in, that's not so good. But as long as you can pay attention and glean something from it, it's fine.

Lenny: "Could you talk about the intention of holding awareness in the whole body, and yet attention may go to specific places in the body or widen beyond the body. Should we just return to the whole body?"

Yeah, I think you can play with it. There's no set rule here. For me, if there's a certain emotion that's activated, or a certain body memory that's been activated, I'll go and hang out in that particular place in the body. It may be activated in the belly, or for some the chest, or a lot of people get activation as a tightness in their throat. So we learn to meet constrictions where they are. And then if I don't have a particular constriction or a particular issue that's up for me, then I'll hang out in the whole body, or I'll hang out in the feet, or in the abdomen. You want to pick places that are grounding to you. And then if you're doing awareness practice, you widen outside of the body, that's great. But don't leave the body when you're doing that. So you kind of stay within the body, but you're almost expanding to experience the environment. So it's all fine.



Whatever helps you to stay embodied, to stay present, and to just attune to yourself more, that's good.

Dagmar asks, "How can I help my students whom I now teach online, with their anxiety and problems, to adapt to the new situation? I'm teaching Tibetan Buddhist literature at the moment, and I already have a breathing mindfulness thing at the end of class."

Yeah, if you feel comfortable and you feel you have some practice in it, then you can. As I've been sharing, I like embodied and body-based practices for working with anxiety. If there's dharma involved, what's innate to the dharma is that we're understanding this as a condition within cyclic existence. So we're understanding that suffering. We're understanding within the first noble truth that there's all these types of suffering that are arising all the time, and that yes, this is one big upheaval in the whole world. But it's part of the nature of samsara, cyclic existence.

That's not necessarily to be defeatist around this, from a Buddhist perspective. It's to understand it in context. Where we understand it's not that suddenly everything's super chaotic. Everything's always chaotic, all the time. It's that maybe we've been somewhat static and then the rug gets pulled out from under us. So in Buddhism, we train in an understanding which we develop around a renunciation mind and *bodhichitta*. Then we develop a connection to the view of emptiness. So all of these things within the Buddhist philosophy are meant to help support us towards awakening, and also to support us through difficult moments of collective suffering like what we're having. So you can use practice and if people can connect with it, you can use the philosophy. But people have to reflect on that, it's not always an immediate thing.

Jessica would like to know where you practiced as a monk and how your life has changed since you left the monastery. And maybe while you're talking from personal experience, Melissa wants to know, "How is it going in Brooklyn, if your friends and family are okay, and your anxiety level?"

Okay. Maybe I'll answer that first. It's good here. It's quiet. My anxiety level is pretty good lately. Like I was saying it was up more last week, but it's okay. My friends and family, they don't live here, but they're doing good. Thanks for asking.

And let's see, the other question. I lived in a few different places as a monk. Mostly I lived in the states in different retreat centers. So I lived for three years in a retreat center called Land of Calm Abiding, which is part of the mandala of Lama Zopa Rinpoche. I was doing a retreat. It's like an isolated mountain retreat, and I was there the first few years as a monk, and then I moved into Tsoknyi Rinpoche's retreat area in Colorado, who was one of my other teachers in my last seven



years as a monk. So I did retreat then, mostly in Colorado. So my life as a monk was different than how it can be for most monastics because I didn't live in a monastic community. Well actually, the first was a monastic community, but it was like a retreat community so everyone had their own cabin and did their own practice. Then the second was mostly just on my own, and I would go to study and be with monastic friends throughout the year, but mostly just doing retreat in Colorado. So was that the whole question?

How has your life changed since then?

Oh, how has it changed? It's a lot more relational. I would say some of it hasn't changed because practice and dharma studies is at the forefront in my life, having the privilege to do this full time as a Buddhist teacher. I still get to engage a lot with the teachings and practices. But I'm not wearing robes anymore and I get to just be a person out there. So that's kind of nice. I enjoy that. And a little bit more relational, not as isolated.

Sue asks, "Can you address the second arrow how it actually throws kerosene on the pandemic fire? People are raging at their government, locally and federally, and it just adds to the problem."

Yeah. I think this is where we have to look in our own yard. I think this is what I meant by working on our mindset. There's the first arrow where we're in the situation; COVID-19 is real, it's not fun to have, some people will die from it. Most people who get sick will recover but it's not necessarily a fun thing. That's the first arrow, that's just how it is. That's the nature of suffering, that's the suffering of the situation.

When we start to rage outwards, we're just accumulating more suffering for ourselves, like Sue said. Now, I'm not saying we shouldn't try to make better systems and try to ask our leadership to do better, they should be doing better. They should be more compassionate. But at the same time, we could sit there and worry and read news article after news article, and we just get stirred up. We have to look at the end of the day, "Who is this really affecting? How is my behavior, and my state of mind, and what I'm thinking about when I'm ruminating—how is it affecting us? The more we think about it, the more we ruminate in it, is that helping the situation?" That's another way to think about it. I don't think so. That's where we need to take care of our inner world, we really need to take care of our minds at this time. That's why I'm recommending people to practice more. It's not to soothe yourself into complacency. But it's to have more groundedness to take more responsibility for the reactions in our minds. That can be really helpful as we're riding this out.



David: "My conditioning is such that I still am quite dissociative when it comes to feeling trauma and anxiety in my body, although I have a lot of experience with body scans. Any suggestions?"

Yes. Dissociation can be experienced as numbness for some people. I'd recommend that you feel the numbness. Just start by hanging out in places in the body that feel neutral to you, or even a place in the body that is pleasant. Don't put too much pressure on yourself for it to shift right away, and don't do it for too long. Just take short moments to come into your feet. You can even do something really playful, like if you live in a place where there's grass near you, put your feet in the grass and wiggle them. Do things to really bring yourself into the body and in connection with the earth. More and more like that. I wouldn't put too much pressure on yourself. But you can try things like that.

Moderator: Thank you, Scott, and thanks, everyone for joining us today. We do have another online group practice like this one coming up on Tuesday, March 31st with Sharon Salzberg at 1pm Eastern, and then on Thursday, April 2nd at 7pm with Lama Surya Das. You can sign up for all these calls, and view this recording and others at tricycle.org/live. And just a reminder, we're providing all these sessions for free. So if you want to help support this, and all our other efforts, please consider donating at tricycle.org/donate. Thank you again and we wish that everyone will be happy and healthy at this time. And thanks again Scott.

Scott: Thanks, everyone. Feel free to reach out anytime. You can find me online.

Moderator: Thanks. Take care.